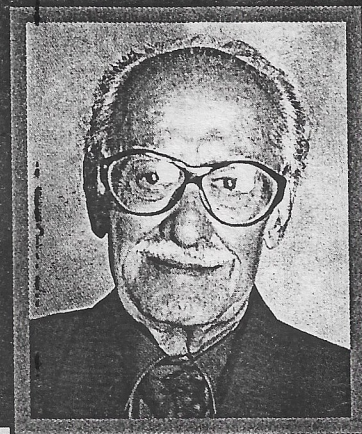


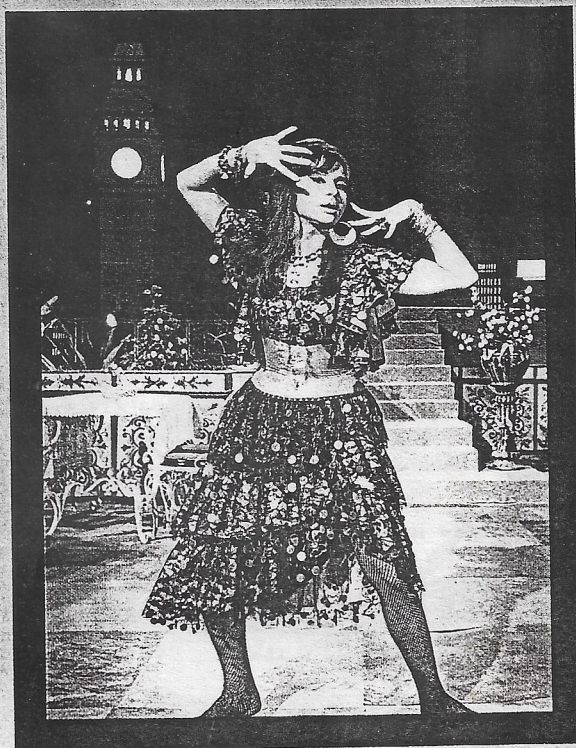
The Entertainer



REMEMBERING NASIR HUSSAIN WHO PASSED AWAY ON MARCH 13



Phir Wohi Dil Laya Hoon



Caravan

Naas *saab*. Aka Nasir Hussain.

A puckish man, smiling genially, even when asked impolite questions.

"Isn't there more to cinema than just entertainment?" I asked belligerently, given his irrevocable belief in those holiday-mood, song-studded, vibgyor-balloon fantasies.

"*Bache*," he said patiently. "It's not easy to make light-hearted romances."

I harrumphed, wondering why he couldn't get more REAL.

Armed with idealistic beliefs about cinema being an instrument of creating social awareness, I badgered on and he smiled on. To-day, with age and time, I can understand that I was being short-sighted even though I didn't wear specs those days and he did.

Slowly but surely I learnt that cinema doesn't have to be limited to any one realm—if there is a need for films which state something valid, there is a need for cinema to make the viewer grin-'n'-giggle. To each film-maker his own.

And Nasir Hussain was a champion at what he did. He was the complete entertainer before others corroded the scene, anointing themselves with grandiose titles like the "next showman" and more such.

Come to think of it, one of the first movies I

ever saw was his *Tumsa Nahin Dekha* at a night show at the Naaz, tickets bought in black by the elders, and all of us in the front row squinting at Shammi Kapoor-Ameeta doing their coochie-coo thing on a *tonga*. Black-and-white *TND* was and yet filled with more colours than you can detect in a rainbow.

Yup, Naas *saab's* stories were always set in hilltowns where women wore slacks-'n'-beehive bouffants and men wore sweater-scarves-'n'-Brylcreemed hair. More often than not, the hero was not-so-wealthy but had been promised the hand of the too-wealthy heroine. The men would stake their rightful claims even if they had to war with the *zaalim jaaydad*-usurper Pran. And so what,

if Rajindranath wore frilly nighties and drove everyone crazy with his jumpety-jump drag act?

There was something extraordinarily innocent and playful about Naas *saab's oeuvre*, and the music was to die for, starting with *TND* and then *Dil Deke Dekho* in which Usha Khanna went into the jiving-jousting mode. And *Jab Pyaar Kisise Hota Hai* in which Shankar-Jaikishen were in the peak of their let's-hum-together form.

Asha Parekh in denim jeans and checked shirt, Dev Anand in baggy big-collared jackets, Joy Mukherjee in shiny blue suits. Confession: *moi* wanted to desperately own a Joyish suit but the

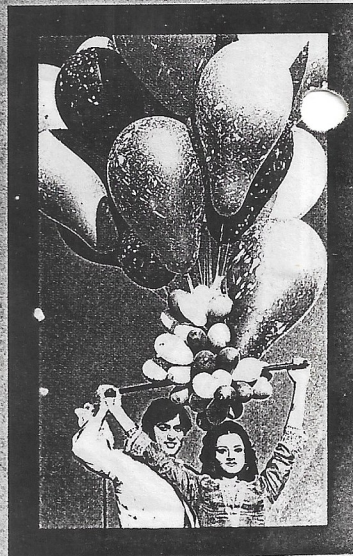
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Dil Deke Dekho



Baharon Ke Sapne



Hum Kisise Kum Nahin

"Nasir and I were

SHAMMI KAPOOR

I met Nasir when I was with Filmistan in 1955. We'd occasionally have lunch at the studio canteen. He was assisting Subodh Mukherjee then.

Nasir was a great influence on me. He was an intelligent guy and very caring. He came from a conservative Muslim family... he was the grand-nephew of Abdul Kalam Azaad *saab*. His knowledge of Urdu was extensive.

He made three films with me, *Tumsa Nahin Dekha*, *Dil Deke Dekho* and *Teesri Manzil*. His movies changed my image.

Films were just an excuse for Nasir and me to interact. Actually we were meant to be together.

I'm the one who got him married to Ayesha. I was there to witness Mansoor's birth. I also attended the premiere of Mansoor's directorial debut *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* at his insistence.

Likewise, he was there for me when my wife Geeta Bali died on January 21, 1965. For three months he kept a set waiting at Mehboob, giving me time to recover from my grief.

Every year I'd wish him on November 16 his birthday... he'd call to wish me on mine on October 21. Last year, he missed my birthday. When I called to speak to him later, I realised that he had lost the will to live. Ayesha's death had bro-

ken him.

Nasir's films were light, fluffy romances. He'd often tell me, "I came to Mumbai from Lucknow with a one-way ticket and one file." A file that carried the Nasir Hussain formula for the dozen films he made.

JOY MUKHERJEE

Nasir Hussain knew me since I was a 10-year-old. My father had signed him to direct *Tumsa Nahin Dekha* and I'd visit the sets quite often, clutching my tennis racquet. He was the first man to tell me that I'd either end up as a tennis star or a film star.

Years later, he directed me in *Phir Wohi Dil Laya Hoon*. We were friends not film associates. I can say so much about him...but I guess you may not have enough space.

RISHI KAPOOR

I'm a fortunate guy because like my uncles Shammi Kapoor and Shashi Kapoor, I got an opportunity to work with Nasir Hussain who was one of the best commercial directors we've ever had.

Raj Kapoor, Manmohan Desai, Yash Chopra and he had individual styles. Others just copied them.

Even today I think Nasir Hussain made the best,

neighbourhood tailor insisted that it wouldn't suit my complexion and physique... oh well.

Truth be told Nasir Hussain's early movies were his best, but it wasn't as if he lost steam after *Phir Wohi Dil Laaya Hoon* or anything quite as predictable as that. I freaked on *Yaadon Ki Baarat* (heavens, even the goggle-eyed Vijay Arora and guitar-twanging Tariq were so likeable then) and hello... wasn't Zeenat Aman swinging to the beat of *Chura Liya Hai Tumne Jo Dil Ko...* something... or someone else?

Or Dharmendra as the tuff brother in a black shirt and blacker wig? Or *Hum Kisise Kum Nahin* with Rishi Kapoor wowing you with his felicity before the camera... even if in one scene, he had to deal with Kajal Kiran (where's she?) dangling in the sky from a bunch of *gubbaras*?

Nasir Hussain was a guilty pleasure, alright. Seniors told me... how can you be nuts about his

movies? Where's the artistry? Where's the sliver of seriousness? Brainwashed for a while, I'd turned up for that first interview with him at his Pali Hill office, ready to attack like a guerrilla.

Gratifyingly, I went home understanding his point of view and always appreciated the fact that our conversation had led to a discussion instead of a slanging match. One of the points he had taken pains to elucidate was that he had tried to get "serious" with *Baharon Ke Sapne*. He didn't say it was a "good film which failed." Instead, he admitted, "I don't have the capability or the mind to make something real. It wasn't a film I completely believed in... and the audience sensed that... never underestimate their intelligence."

Quite. Naas *saab* was in form with his *Teesri Manzil* (which he produced), *Pyar Ka Mausam* and *Caravan* then. As the years advanced and styles changed—he was imitated beyond recognition—

meant to be together"

—Shammi Kapoor

breezy romantic comedies. He admitted to me that his formula rarely changed. He made a few cosmetic changes in his scripts and churned out a dozen entertainers.

Funny, despite the huge age gap between us, Nasir *saab* treated me like a friend, not a son. We could laugh and joke about anything.

The music in his movies was terrific. He also had a weird sense of humour which reflected in his work. If you've noticed, the stage show numbers were started in films by Nasir *saab*. His son Mansoor had just returned with a degree in engineering from the USA... and Nasir *saab* allowed him to try out his gizmos and lights for the special stage numbers.

We lost touch. I heard he was spending time between Coonoor and Mumbai. He took his wife's death very badly. He was a broken man after that.

JEETENDRA

I worked with Nasir Hussain by default. Rajesh Khanna, who had earlier done *Baharon Ke Sapne*, with him was to do *Caravan*. I guess Nasir *saab* felt I suited the lead in *Caravan* better, so he approached me. It is my assumption that Rajesh Khanna didn't work with Nasir *saab* after that because he felt short-changed.

the Nasir Hussain formula wore thin. I think his heart wasn't in *Manzil Manzil*... and after that, somewhere along the line, he thought it more practical to hand over the reins to his son Mansoor.

Naas *saab*, surprise surprise, could take criticism. I thought he would never speak to me again after my review of *Manzil Manzil* but he rang up at the dot of 10 on Sunday morning, to say, "I don't have any hesitation in saying you're right."

The thumbs-up review for Mansoor's *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* evoked another Sunday 10 a.m. response, this time with a succinct, "Thanks."

I interviewed Hussain Sr several times... and don't have the foggiest if those q-'n'-a's with him are lingering in the *raddi* vaults somewhere. I long to re-read them because he spoke with articulation and ease. Neither did he ever want to impress nor downplay himself.

What I liked about Nasir *saab* was his immense love for his younger brother Tahir. Every time I saw the two brothers together, I always said to myself, *bhai ho to aise*.

We had a truck in *Caravan* which had huge cardboard cutouts of buxom women on it. Nasir *saab* would tell me, "*Yeh dekh Tahir ne kya laga diya truck pe*," and chuckle.

The atmosphere on his sets was very comfortable, much like the movies he made... easygoing. Even years after *Caravan*, whenever I shot at Mehboob studio, I'd visit his office which was right across the road.

I had signed him for my home production...but it didn't happen. In recent years, I got so busy with Balaji Productions that I rarely saw Nasir *saab*. He, C.J. Wadhwa who's a lawyer by profession, and I were good friends.

My last meeting with him was at a *Filmfare* Awards function a few years ago. He was frail and needed help to walk.

He loved his wife... when he lost her last year, he probably lost the will to live.

He was also very proud of his son Mansoor whose scripts he wrote. He'd often complain, "My son is so difficult to work with. But for me there's no escaping him. If I don't deliver, he catches me at the dinner table. *Main kya karoon?*"

One of his regrets, I suspect, was that he couldn't make the ambitious film he had announced with Dilip Kumar. It was titled *Zabardast* if I'm not wrong. Whenever I asked him whatever happened, he'd say evasively, "You know how Yusuf *saab* is."

I don't but that's another story.

The last image I have of Naas *saab* is of him sitting in his neat garden at the back of his bun-galow on Pali Hill. His wife served tea and sandwiches. I'd gone there to ask him to accept the *Filmfare* Lifetime Achievement Award.

He wasn't well, thin and tired, a shadow of his former cheery self. "I'll be there," he said quietly and walked away after finishing half a cup of tea.

Naas *saab* reached the awards function well in time to collect his trophy from the stage. He saw me beaming, he patted me on the back, quietly said, "Thanks..." and walked away forever.

Khalid Mohamed